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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENGDU 000065

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DEPT FOR EAP/CM AND G  
BANGKOK FOR USAID STIEVATER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: GROWING UP A TIBETAN CADRE KID IN CHINA - DIALOGUE WITH HAN  
SOMETIMES POSSIBLE, NEVER EASY

REF: A. CHENGDU 42  
[1](#)B. CHENGDU 61  
[1](#)C. CHENGDU 17  
[1](#)D. CHENGDU 55

CHENGDU 00000065 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: James A. Boughner, Consul General, U.S. Consulate  
General, Chengdu.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: While not going into detail about recent unrest in western Sichuan and other Tibetan areas, a well-educated son of Communist Party officials shared with Post his experiences as a young ethnic Tibetan studying and working in inland China. An admirer of the banned Tibetan-Chinese writer Woese, our contact described how he joined a foreign-funded organization to promote Tibetan language development after Chinese security officials ordered him to shut down an Internet site he established as a forum on Tibetan issues. An example perhaps of how a new rising generation of Chinese-educated Tibetans will not necessarily toe the official political line, our contact complained that societal prejudice and years of propaganda can make it very difficult to have a real discussion on Tibet with Han Chinese. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Congenoff met recently with a contact working for a non-governmental organization in Chengdu to elicit his thoughts on life as an ethnic Tibetan intellectual in today's China. The contact was born near Lhasa to two Tibetan Communist Party cadres and was one of the first group of young Tibetans to benefit from the Party's policy of giving school opportunities in the Chinese interior to specially selected -- often politically connected -- students. After finishing elementary school in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), the contact went to middle school in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, high school in Chengdu and then to university at Beijing Normal University. Like many young Tibetans educated in the interior of China, including two university students Congenoff met in Lhasa during February (ref a), the contact achieved native fluency in speaking and writing Chinese but only a marginal level of written Tibetan.

[1](#)3. (C) Our contact described how during junior high school he received several hours of Tibetan language instruction a week, but that this was insufficient to achieve the level of an

educated person and he felt dissatisfied. Like other Tibetans with his background, our contact stressed he feels he is as Tibetan as those who have not studied in inland China. Since language is the vehicle of culture, however, he and others like him need to strive harder to achieve a good level of Tibetan fluency. Our contact knows personally the most famous of a rising generation of Chinese-educated Tibetans, writer and journalist Woese, and referred to her as, "widely revered." (Note: the Tibetan-Chinese journalist and poet Tsering Woese is the author of "Notes on Tibet" and "Forbidden Memories: Eyewitness Accounts of Tibet During the Cultural Revolution." Both are banned in the PRC. Currently under restrictions in Beijing, Woese, who does not speak or read Tibetan well, still posts to a Chinese language blog on a foreign server at woese.middle-way.net. Two blogs hosted inside the PRC, however, have been shutdown. End note).

#### Internet Opens Up New World

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14. (C) After finishing university, our contact had legal training at a school in Nanjing. Fascinated by the Internet and the world that it opened up to him, he ran the Internet website Newt Tibet.com from 2002-2005 to explore ideas on politics and government and how they could be used to help Tibetans. The contact stressed repeatedly the importance of the Internet in opening up his mind. He found on the Internet many ideas and perspectives that were not available to him before. Although Newt Tibet.com achieved some fame and success for a while, government authorities closed it down three times. The first two times, no government official would admit to having closed it down and our contact was able to get it back on the Internet relatively quickly. The third time, however, public security officers visited him and threatened that if he persisted in running his website he would face serious albeit unspecific consequences. His website remained closed. Public security visited him regularly to enquire if he had foreign financial support. He stressed that he had none.

CHENGDU 00000065 002.2 OF 002

#### Teaching Tibetan in Western Sichuan

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15. (C) For the past several years, our contact has worked in western Sichuan Province's Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP) for a charity run by an overseas Tibetan family that is registered as a private company. (Note: NGOs working as private companies are common in China given the practical difficulties of registration -- see ref b-- and the uncertain legal status of NGO work. End note). The charity assists local educational authorities to build schools and subsidize the salaries of some teachers. The contact described how in Ganzi there are three types of elementary and middle schools:

- a) Schools that teach all subjects in Tibetan with the exception of a course in Chinese as a second language.
- b) Schools that teach all subjects in Chinese, with the exception of a Tibetan language course.
- c) Schools that teach all courses in Chinese and offer no Tibetan.

16. (C) According to our contact, the great majority of the schools in Ganzi are of the second type. The charity he works for has been providing grants directly to localities of 400 RMB a month per teacher. The charity is also working to improve Tibetan language teaching materials. Our contact noted that when Tibetan students are taught in their native language they do much better, especially in math and science. He mentioned the work of the scholar Tsering Dhudrup of Kangding (ref c) who has shown in pilot studies the benefits of Tibetan language education.

#### Trying to Get Through to the Han

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17. (C) Consulate contact opined it is possible for Tibetans to help Han Chinese understand Tibetan perspectives, although there are two big barriers. The first barrier is to get a local Han interlocutor to think differently and appreciate the true meaning of democracy and the law. Quite a few Chinese intellectuals have surmounted this barrier. The second barrier of surmounting the extremely detailed and finely knit "Tibet story" that the Chinese Communist Party has pushed since the 1950s is more difficult. Many Chinese do not understand or are unable to believe, for example, that the Dalai Lama is universally revered among Tibetans. The contact noted that some of the criticisms of Tibet's old society are justified. A new Tibet cannot be like the old. Years of Chinese belittling and defaming Tibetans and their culture and treating Tibetans differently, even from all the other Chinese minorities, however, have made a deep mark on Tibetans. Although he has been able to get through to some of his Han friends on Tibetan issues and does not discount the value of dialogue, our contact hopes Han Chinese will be able to change their thinking and adopt a more "civilized" attitude towards Tibetans.

Comment

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18. (C) Prejudice against Tibetans in Southwest China on the individual and institutional level is not acknowledged officially to be a problem (ref d). Most of our Han Chinese interlocutors appear to share the view of a local school official we recently spoke with who stressed that, since Tibetans get "enormous" government subsidies and are treated much better than Han Chinese, it can only be a tiny minority of outside agitators who have been causing recent troubles. As in religious affairs, where the explicit constitutional right to propagate atheism is given emphasis over religious freedom, minority rights are theoretically guaranteed by such political arrangements as autonomous prefectures. Everyday practice, however, is very different. The contempt and discrimination that many ethnic Tibetans continue to feel against their culture and religion, whatever their economic or educational background, will likely continue to frustrate the Chinese Government's conception of a harmonious melting pot.  
BOUGHNER